Mr. BINGHAM's

DISCOURSE

Concerning the

Mercy of GOD, &c.

DISCOURSE

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A DISCOURSE

Concerning the

Mercy of GOD

TO

PENITENT SINNERS:

Intended for the Use of

Persons Troubled in Mind.

By JOSEPH BINGHAM,
Rector of *Havant*.

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Qui vixit et
Hijt Parochus
mouit
Rectoris

LONDON:
Printed for ROBERT KNAPLOCK, at the *Bishop's Head* in St. *Paul's Church-yard*. 1714.

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Perſons Troubled in Mind.

BRITISH MUSEUM

By JOSEPH BINGHAM,

Rector of Havant.

LONDON:

Printed for ROBERT KNAPTON, at the

Mitre over-against St. Paul's Church-yard. 1734.

Psal. ciii. 13.

As a Father pitieth his Children, ſo the Lord pitieth them that fear him.

AS there is no Quality in God more Amiable in itſelf, or more Comfortable in its Conſideration to Human Nature, than the Attribute of Mercy: So there is nothing the Scripture ſeems more Emphatically to impreſs upon us a firm Belief and a right Apprehenſion of, than this. It repreſents God as delighting and glorying in this Character, That He is Merciful and Gracious, Long-ſuffering, and abundant in Goodneſs and Truth; keeping Mercy for Thouſands, forgiving Iniquity, Tranſgreſſion and Sin, as God proclaimed before *Moſes* at Mount *Sinai*, *Exod.* xxxiv. 6. And the more to make us ſenſible of this, it condeſcends to ſpeak to us in the moſt familiar Way, raiſing Idea's of God's Mercy in us by Things that we are moſt intimately acquainted with; comparing the Actions and Diſpoſition of God to thoſe of a tender and a Compaſſionate Father toward his Children: This is ve-

ry Pathetically repreſented by our SAVIOUR in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, *Luke* xv. And here by the Pſalmiſt in the Text, *As a Father pitieth his Children, ſo the Lord pitieth them that fear him.*

FROM which Words my Deſign is to ſpeak of the Mercy of GOD, not in General, as it relates to all his Creatures (*for his Mercy is over all his Works*) but as it particularly relates to Penitent Sinners, who are here deſcribed under the Character of them that fear him. In doing this I ſhall

I. *Give ſome eminent Inſtances of* GOD's *ſignal Pity and Mercy toward Penitent Sinners.*

II. *Obviate and anſwer ſome Difficulties, which often make Penitent Sinners think they want* GOD's *Mercy, when they really injoy it.*

III. *Apply the Diſcourſe in ſome Practical and Moral Reflections.*

IN ſpeaking to the firſt Point, I muſt not now inſiſt, either Firſt upon GOD's ſending his Son to die for Mankind; though it was a moſt ſingular Act of GOD's Mercy, recommending his Love towards us, in that *whilſt we were yet Sinners,* CHRIST *died for us*; Nor *Secondly*, upon GOD's *ſending his Holy Spirit, to Call and Prevent us with his Aſſiſting Grace*: Becauſe both theſe are Acts of Mercy antecedent to our Repentance, and offered to Sinners in Order to make them Penitent, and turn them unto GOD, before they have any Power or Will to turn themſelves. But the Acts of Pity

I am

I am to ſpeak of, are ſuch as GOD ſhews to Penitent Sinners, when they firſt begin to Repent, and are actually on their Way to GOD. And theſe are Three. 1. That He takes notice of the firſt Eſſays and Beginnings of Goodneſs in them, and bears with their Weakneſs, till they arrive to Strength and a Perfect Reformation. 2. That He helps and aſſiſts them all along in their Progreſs. 3. That He crowns their Endeavours by a kind Reception, and complete Pardon of all their Offences.

1. HE takes notice of the firſt Eſſays and Beginnings of Goodneſs in them, and bears with their Weakneſs, till they arrive to Strength and a Perfect Reformation. A Father does not expect the ſame Manly Service from his Children, whilſt they are Children, as he may require of them when they are arrived to the ſtate of Perfect Men: Nor does he exact the ſame meaſure of Activity, Labour, or Sagacity from thoſe of a weaker Frame, or meaner Parts and Abilities, as he does from thoſe whom he knows to be of a more bright and lively Genius, or a more Robuſt and Athletick Conſtitution. So in like manner it is with GOD in his Dealings with Penitent Sinners: He does not expect at their firſt Converſion to find in them immediately all the pleaſing Graces and Perfections of Nature and full grown Chriſtians. There is a Weakneſs and Dulneſs, and Prejudices, and a Littleneſs of Faith, which for ſome time he is willing to bear in them, as CHRIST did in his own Diſciples. So long as they are hearty and ſincere, He does not exact more than they are able to offer him: Only He requires their Prayers, and Endeavours after more Grace, that they may go on

to Perfection. He is pleaſed to hear a ſincere Heart Cry, LORD, *I Believe, Help thou my Unbelief.* He conſiders alſo, that He has not made all his Creatures of the ſame Size and Abilities, nor given equal Meaſures and Portions of his Grace to all alike: Some have more Time and Leiſure, better Opportunities, leſs Encumbrances, Quicker Underſtandings, and more Faithful Memories than others; ſome have an happier Education, and are qualified to conſult the Oracles of GOD themſelves; whilſt others, for the little Inſtruction they get, are forced to be beholden to the Charity of others. He does not therefore exact the ſame Meaſures of Performance from all alike, but only requires Men to be ſincere to what they know, and what they are able: *To whomſoever much is given, of him much ſhall be required; but to whom little is given, of him little ſhall be required:* Only He expects an Honeſt and Induſtrious Mind, to do what Men are able, according to the Proportion of Grace that He affords them; And then the Widows Mites are as acceptable an Offering, as the Abundance of others; and in all other Caſes, if there be firſt a Willing Mind, it is accepted according to that a Man hath, and not according to that he hath not. For GOD is pleaſed with the firſt Appearances of real Goodneſs in his Children, and not only accepts them, but helps and encourages them to go on to Perfection. *The bruiſed Reed he will not break, the ſmoaking Flax he will not quench, till he ſends forth Judgment unto Victory.* Which brings me to the Second Act of GOD's Mercy toward Repenting Sinners, which is,

2. THAT He not only bears with their Weakneſs, but helps and aſſiſts them all along in their Progreſs,

Progreſs, till they come to full Strength and a perfect Reformation. This He does by the various Methods of his Grace; inviting, nay drawing them to himſelf, by the Powerful, though many Times inviſible and undiſcernable Operations of his Holy Spirit. Which Spirit illuminates their Underſtanding by degrees, and leads them into all neceſſary Truth; He takes off the hardneſs of their Hearts, and corrects the frowardneſs of their Wills; He regulates all their Affections, and fixes them to their right and proper Objects; giving a new Turn and Biaſs to all their Inclinations, till they come to a perfect Conformity to the Will of GOD; He opens their Hearts, and ſtill makes them more and more attentive to the Word of GOD; by the Promiſes whereof He fortifies them againſt Terror and Deſpair, and makes all the ſeeming Difficulties of Religion wear off, by adding new Strength, Succour, and Courage to their firſt Endeavours, and keeping their Minds warm in Devotion, and fix'd and intent upon the Buſineſs of another World. This good Spirit omits no Opportunities of doing them good, but takes all the moſt proper and ſeaſonable Occaſions to inſpire good Thoughts into them. Even a Thouſand ſeeming Accidents of their Lives become Providential Calls and Admonitions to them, whilſt the Spirit makes every Thing work together for good to them that love GOD. By theſe and ſuch like Means (ſtrengthening, not deſtroying, our Natural Faculties) a Man who before was Weak, nay, Dead in Treſpaſſes and Sins, is not only quickned and ſet at Liberty, but able to ſay with the great Apoſtle, *I can do all Things through Chriſt that ſtrengthneth me.* This is the Second Act of GOD's Mercy toward Repenting Sinners, That He helps and aſſiſts them all along in their Progreſs, till

till they arrive to full Strength and a perfect Reformation. Then

Thirdly, He crowns their Endeavours by a kind Reception into Peace and Favour, and a compleat Pardon of all their Offences. Whenever a Sinner returns again to him from his evil Ways, he immediately lays aside his Wrath, cancels his former Displeasure, blots out the Sinner's Ingratitude, forgets his Offences, and remembers his Sins no more. He retains no secret Grudge, or thoughrs of Revenge against him; never expostulates the Matter with him more about his former Life, chides not, upbraids him not with his by-past Follies, but passes an Act of Oblivion upon all his Offences, and readily receives him into Favour. "If the "Wicked will turn from all his Sins that he hath "committed, and keep all my Statutes, and do "that which is lawful and right, he shall surely "live, he shall not die. All his Transgressions "that he hath committed, shall not be mention'd "unto him: In his Righteousness that he hath "done he shall live," is God's general Promise to all repenting Sinners, *Ezek.* xviii. 21, 22. And *Jer.* xxxi. 34. *I will forgive their Iniquity, and I will remember their Sin no more.*

IN which Places we are to take notice of the greatness and extensiveness of God's Mercy, together with the readiness and quickness of it; which are Qualifications, that most eminently recommend it above any Thing that is ordinarily to be found in Humane Goodness.

FOR God Pardons readily, not only lesser Faults, but those of the greatest Magnitude. How great

great were *David*'s Crimes, Adultery and Murder, Ingratitude to GOD, and Forgetfulneſs of His Mercies towards him? And yet upon his true Repentance GOD readily pardoned him. He could no ſooner make an hearty Confeſſion of his Sins, but the Prophet in GOD's Name gave him a comfortable Abſolution: The LORD hath put away thy Sin, thou ſhalt not die, 2 *Sam.* xii. 13. But there was one Sin greater than all theſe of *David* put together, which yet GOD pardoned; and that was Murdering CHRIST his own Son, the Prince of Life and Glory. Upon which St. *Auſtin* makes this Diſcourſe, to comfort the greateſt of Sinners. "Let no Man * ſay I have done ſuch or "ſuch a Thing, and I fear it will not be for-"given me. What haſt thou done? What great "Sin haſt thou committed? Tell me, ſome mon-"ſtrous, grievous, horrible Crime, which thou "art afraid to think of. Let it be what it will: "Haſt thou killed CHRIST? There can be no "Fact worſe than that, becauſe there is nothing "better than CHRIST. How great a wicked-"neſs is it to Murder CHRIST! But the *Jews* "did Murder him, yet many of them afterwards "repented and believed, and drank his Blood; "and the Sin which they had committed was "forgiven them."

THIS Diſcourſe is founded upon St. *Peter*'s Sermon to the *Jews*, which We read of *Acts* ii. 22. Where he firſt lays before them, the greatneſs of their Crime: *Ye Men of Iſrael, hear theſe Words; Jeſus of* Nazareth, *a Man approved of God among you*

* Aug. de Symbolo. Lib. 1. cap. 7. Tom. 9. p. 294.

you by Miracles and Wonders, and Signs, which God did by him in the midſt of you, as ye yourſelves alſo know: Him being delivered by the determinate Counſel and Fore-knowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked Hands have crucify'd and ſlain. What then? Muſt they for ever deſpair of Pardon for this? No: *But repent,* ſays he, *and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jeſus Chriſt for the Remiſſion of Sins, and ye ſhall receive the Gift of the Holy Ghoſt,* ver. 38. And then it follows, (*v.* 41.) *That they who gladly received his Word, were baptized: And the ſame Day there were added unto them about Three Thouſand Souls.* In the next Chapter he Diſcourſed much after the ſame manner, and with the like good Effect. *Ye deny'd the Holy One, and the Juſt, and deſired a Murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince of Life, whom God hath raiſed from the Dead,* Acts iii. 14. yet he does not diſcourage them from ſeeking Pardon, but gives them aſſurance of obtaining it, if they would take the proper Methods to procure it: Which was, *Repent and be Converted, that your Sins may be blotted out, when the Times of Refreſhing ſhall come from the Preſence of the Lord.* And ſo it was: *For many of them which heard the Word, believed; and the Number of the Men was about Five Thouſand,* Acts 44.

THESE were ſignal Inſtances of GOD's Mercy, in Pardoning the Murderers of his own Son, left upon Record for our Inſtruction and Comfort; that no one might deſpair of GOD's Mercy, whoſe Sins are not greater than that of Murdering CHRIST.

St. *Paul* ſays, he himſelf obtained Mercy for the ſame Reaſon, that he might be an encouraging Example

example of GOD's forbearance to all others, 1 *Tim.* i. 15, 16. *This is a faithful Saying, and worthy of all Acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the World to save Sinners, of whom I am chief.* For he was before a Blasphemer, and a Persecutor, and Injurious, and concerned in the Murder of St. *Stephen*, and others of GOD's Saints, who when they were put to Death, he gave his Voice against them. *Howbeit for this Cause*, says he, *I obtained Mercy, that in me first, or in me the chiefest of Sinners, Jesus Christ might shew forth all Long-Suffering, for a Pattern to them which should hereafter believe to Life Everlasting.*

BUT it will be said, all these were Sins committed before Baptism, which much alters the Case: For there is no Second Baptism for Remission of Sins allow'd after the First, for those *who are once enlightned, and have tasted of the Heavenly Gift, and were made Partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good Word of* GOD, *if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto Repentance: Seeing they Crucify to themselves the Son of* GOD *afresh, and put him to an open shame.* To which I answer, That this does not at all alter the Case: For though the Sins of *David*, and the *Jews*, and St. *Paul* were committed before Baptism, yet they were not before Circumcision, which was the same thing to them, as Baptism is now unto us, an Entrance into the Covenant of GOD, and the Visible Seal of it. So that as GOD allow'd of a Method of Expiation after Circumcision, so he does now after Baptism, though Baptism be now no more to be repeated over again, than Circumcision was. For GOD in His Mercy,

as St. *Austin* * obſerves, has allow'd us Three Ways to obtain Remiſſion of Sins. 1. Baptiſm, which cleanſes us from all manner of Sins, Original and Actual, great and ſmall. 2. Prayer and Daily Addreſs to the Throne of Grace for leſſer Sins of daily Incurſion, without which no Man lives. For Pardon of theſe he has taught us to ſay; *Forgive us our Treſpaſſes, as we forgive them that Treſpaſs againſt us.* 3. For greater and more heinous Sins he has allow'd us the expiation of a more ſolemn and particular Repentance; and that either Publick, in caſe of ſcandalous, flagrant, and publick Crimes, which deſerve Excommunication from the Body of CHRIST; or elſe private Repentance between GOD and ourſelves, for ſuch Crimes as do not bring us under the Publick Diſcipline and Cenſures of the Church. So that beſide Baptiſm we have a double Method of obtaining Pardon of Sins, according to their different Quality and Greatneſs. Which Pardon is Confirmed and Sealed to us in the Holy Communion, as it were by a viſible Demonſtration, which gives us, as by a Deed of Conveyance, the Body and Blood of

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* Aug. de Symbolo ad Catechumenos, Lib. 1. cap. 7. Tom. 9. p. 294. Propter omnia peccata Baptiſmus inventus eſt: propter levia, ſine quibus eſſe non poſſumus, Oratio inventa. Quid habet Oratio? Dimitte nobis Debita noſtra, ſicut & nos dimittimus Debitoribus noſtris. Semel abluimur Baptiſmate, quotidie abluimur Oratione. Sed nolite illa committere, pro quibus neceſſe eſt ut à Chriſti corpore ſeparemini; quod abſit à vobis. Illi enim quos videtis agere Pœnitentiam, Scelera commiſerunt, aut Adulteria, aut aliqua facta immania; inde agunt Pœnitentiam. Nam ſi levia peccata ipſorum eſſent, adhæc Quotidiana Oratio delenda ſufficeret. Ergo tribus modis dimittuntur peccata in Eccleſia, in Baptiſmate, in Oratione, in Humilitate majore (al majoris) pœnitentiæ, &c.

of CHRIST, and all the Expiation and Atonement that attends them. So that a Sinner needs not complain of GOD for want of Mercy, since there are so many Ways of Dispensing Pardon to us after Baptism.

BUT some, who are Actually pardoned by GOD and in his Favour, cannot think themselves so, because they find his Hand in some measure still upon them; either First in Temporal Calamities, which are many Times the Natural effects of Sin; or, Secondly in Providential Afflictions, which he for Wise Reasons, and their own Good, is pleased to lay and continue upon them; Or, Thirdly, because they are sometimes under fresh Agonies upon the Remembrance of their By-past Sins; Or, Fourthly, because GOD's Grace is not so powerfull in them, as to cleanse them from all the Relicks of sinful Frailty and Corruption, and make them Angels before their Time; Or, Lastly, because they are still liable to Temptations, and troubled with black and ugly Thoughts, darted into their Minds against their Wills, by the power and subtlety of Satan. Now to remove these scruples and complaints I proceed to the Second general Thing proposed, which was,

II. TO obviate and answer those Difficulties, which often make penitent Sinners think they want GOD's Mercy, when they really enjoy it. And to These I shall answer both in General and in Particular.

IN General, I say, All this proceeds only from a wrong Apprehension of the Mercy of GOD, which does not oblige Him to remove all these

ſeveral Sorts of Afflictions, or Imperfections from Sinners at the Moment that He pardons their Sins. For CHRIST had no Sin; he was Innocence itſelf, that needed no Pardon; and yet he was a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with Grief all his Life: Nay, he was ſubject to Temptations alſo, as we are, yet without Sin, that he might know how to ſuccour them that are tempted. What wonder then, that any mortal Sinner ſhould be ſubject to ſuch Calamities, as CHRIST himſelf, the Immortal God, who knew no Sin, was pleas'd to ſubmit to, as well for our Benefit as Inſtruction.

BUT to anſwer a little more particularly and diſtinctly to the ſeveral Scruples: I obſerv'd in the firſt Place, That Temporal Calamities were many times only the natural Effects of Sin. And why ſhould any Man wonder, that GOD ſhould permit the natural Effects of Sin to remain upon the Sinner after Pardon, when in many Caſes it could not otherwiſe without a ſpecial Miracle? If a Man by a drunken or debauch'd Life, brings upon himſelf a lingring Fever, or a Conſumption, GOD may pardon his Sin upon his true Repentance; but He is not oblig'd, either by any Promiſe, or by the Nature of his Mercy, to work a ſpecial Miracle in his Caſe, to deliver him from his bodily Diſtemper. Nay, perhaps it is a Mercy not to deliver him from it; ſince without a ſecond Miracle of Preventing Grace, perhaps the Man as ſoon as he was heal'd, would return to his old Courſe again. It is rather Mercy therefore to let the natural Effects of his Sins remain upon him, even after Pardon.

2. SO

2. SO again, If GOD sends some Providential Afflictions upon Men; they are not to interpret these always as Acts of Anger or Judgment, but Arguments of His Kindness and Mercy, design'd by GOD only to prevent Sin, and keep them humble. As it was in the Case of St. *Paul*, who was a Chosen Vessel, and a particular Favorite of Heaven; yet GOD thought fit to afflict him with a Thorn in the Flesh, a Messenger of Satan sent to buffet him, to keep him humble, lest he should be exalted above measure, through the Abundance of the Revelations that were given him. For this he besought the LORD thrice, that it might depart from him: But he only receiv'd this Answer, That GOD's Grace should be sufficient for him, that God's Strength should be perfected in his Weakness. With which Answer he was satisfy'd, and made no farther Complaints, as if GOD was wanting to him in his Mercy: But, *most gladly therefore*, says he, *will I rather glory in my Infirmities, that the Power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in Infirmities, in Reproaches, in Necessities, in Persecutions, in Distresses for Christ's sake: For when I am weak, then am I strong*, 2 Cor. xii. 10. The Afflictions of *Job* were, in like manner, not Expressions of GOD's Anger, but his Infinite Wisdom and Kindness to him; to approve his Patience to all the World, and give him such a surprizing Victory over Satan, as made even the Adversary himself imagine, there was something more in Humane Nature, assisted by Grace, than he before was apprehensive of. So that when GOD sends Providential Afflictions upon penitent Sinners, they are not always Scourges, but sometimes Mercies, to try their Patience, or to preserve

ſerve them from Sin. And if their Prayers for Removal of them are at laſt heard, as *Job*'s was, they may rejoyce and be thankful. If they are deny'd, as St. *Paul*'s was, they may be patient ſtill, and rejoyce in their Infirmities with the great Apoſtle, that the Power of CHRSIT may reſt upon them.

3. BUT ſome Penitents are afraid their Sins are not pardon'd, becauſe they are frequently under Fears and Apprehenſions of GOD's Anger and Diſpleaſure recurring upon them. Now, if this be for any new wilfull Sins committed after Pardon, they have Reaſon enough indeed to fear; becauſe of that Saying of our SAVIOUR, *Thou art made Whole; ſin no more, leſt a worſe Thing come unto thee.* But if it be only for the Remembrance of former Sins, which are already pardon'd, ſuch Fears are no Indications of their being out of GOD's Favour, but Tokens of his Mercy, who ſuffers ſuch Fears to recur upon them, to make their Repentance Commenſurate with their Lives, and by the Abhorrence of by-paſs'd Sins, to keep them from future Falling. That it is ſo, is evident from the Caſe of *David*, who after his Sin, was pardon'd by the Mouth of the Prophet, and he was infallibly aſſur'd of it, yet he lay under great Agonies and Conflicts of Soul upon the Remembrance of his great Tranſgreſſions. Hear one or two of his Expreſſions and Complaints upon this Occaſion, *Pſal.* xxxviii. 2. *Thy Arrows ſtick faſt in me, and thy Hand preſſeth me ſore: There is no Soundneſs in my Fleſh becauſe of thy Anger, neither is there any Reſt in my Bones by reaſon of my Sin. For my Iniquities are gone over my Head, as a ſore Burden, they are too heavy for me. My*

Wounds

Wounds ſtink and are corrupt becauſe of my Fooliſhneſs; I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly: I go mourning all the Day long. For my Loins are filled with a loathſome Diſeaſe, and there is no Soundneſs in my Fleſh. I am feeble and ſore broken: I have roared for the very Diſquietneſs of my Heart. So again, *Pſal.* lxxvii. 2. *My Sore ran in the Night, and ceaſed not; my Soul refuſed to be comforted. I remember'd* GOD, *and was troubled: I complain'd, and my Spirit was overwhelm'd. Thou holdeſt my Eyes waking, I am ſo troubled that I cannot ſpeak. Will the* LORD *caſt off for ever? and will He be no more entreated? Is his Mercy clean gone for ever? And doth his Promiſe fail for evermore? Hath* GOD *forgotten to be Gracious? Hath He in Anger ſhut up his Tender-Mercies?* At laſt, he recollects, and checks himſelf for theſe Complaints; *I ſaid, This is my own Infirmity: But I will remember the Years of the Right Hand of the Moſt High.* I will call to mind what GOD before has done for me, and then there will be no Room nor Reaſon for ſuch Complaints as theſe.

4. BUT Some are afraid their Sins are not pardon'd, becauſe they find in themſelves ſtill the Remainders of Sin; and Grace is not ſo powerful in them, as to conquer all manner of Sin whatſoever. Now, if this be meant of Willful, Reigning, Groſs, Habitual Sins, they have Reaſon indeed to fear: For then their Repentance is not ſincere, whilſt they knowingly cheriſh any one Reigning Vice in their Souls; For he that keepeth the whole Law, and yet offendeth in one Point, is guilty of all. He that ſaid, Do not commit Adultery, ſaid alſo, Do not Kill: Now if thou commit no Adultery, yet if thou Kill, thou art become a Tranſgreſſor of the Law; and ſo long

long thou art not in a State of Grace and Favour with GOD, becauſe thou art a willful Tranſgreſſor of his Law. But if it be meant only of leſſer Sins of Ignorance, Inadvertency, ſudden Surprize, and Humane Frailty, to which all Men are liable, againſt which they Daily ſtrive, but cannot wholly conquer; theſe are conſiſtent with a State of Grace and Favour: Becauſe the very beſt of Men are ſtill liable to them. In many Things we offend all: And in this Senſe, there is no Man lives, and ſinneth not. But GOD in his Mercy hath provided a Remedy for theſe, which is our Daily Prayers: *Forgive us our Treſpaſſes, as we forgive them that treſpaſs againſt us.* If it were otherwiſe, our Condition were very Deplorable! For then no Man could be ſav'd; there being no Man, except CHRIST alone, that ever liv'd without theſe. So that if GOD ſhould be extreme to mark what is done amiſs, no Man could abide it; If He ſhould ſtrictly enter into Judgment with us for theſe Things, no Man living could be juſtified in his Sight. For this is only the Perfection of Angels, and the Privilege of the Spirits of Juſt Men made Perfect. Whilſt we are in this Body of Fleſh, there will be thoſe Failings and Imperfections in us. GOD has left them in us to exerciſe our Care and Vigilance, and to keep us humble and depending upon his Grace, and to quicken our Addreſſes to Him for more and more Strength to overcome them. Therefore we ought to Watch and Strive indeed againſt them as much as we can, and pray, That *his Will may be done in Earth as it is done in Heaven.* But, if after all our Prayers and Endeavours, we cannot wholly free ourſelves from them, we are not to Deſpond, becauſe we are only in the Condition of all Mankind. We

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ought alſo to grieve and ſorrow for theſe Imperfections, as well as all others, and to aſpire after the Place that will ſet us at Liberty from them: But we muſt not expect to be Angels before our Time, but whilſt we are in this Vale of Miſery, be content to bear theſe as part of our Afflictions which nothing but Death, or rather a Victory over Death and Mortality, will wholly conquer. In the mean Time, we have Aſſurance, that GOD will not impute them to us to our Condemnation, but pity us, and pardon us upon our conſtant Prayers and daily Repentance. And in this Senſe it is, that St. *Auſtin* (*) calls theſe Venial Sins; not becauſe any Sin is not Mortal in its own Nature, but becauſe they are ſuch as God will not impute to his Servants, that ſincerely Love Him, to their Condemnation.

5. BUT ſome Penitents are afraid their Sins are not pardon'd, becauſe they are ſtill liable to Temptations, and troubled with black and ugly Thoughts, darted into their Minds againſt their Wills, by the power and ſubtilty of Satan. Now in this Caſe Two Things are always diligently to be enquir'd into. 1. Whether Temptations are of Mens own procuring, either by Idleneſs and want of ſome honeſt Employment, or by putting themſelves in the way of Temptation, by engaging in any unlawful Buſineſs or Diverſion? And 2. Whether a Man cheriſhes the Temptation, or gives way and conſent to it? If either of theſe be his

(*) Aug. de Symbolo. Lib. I. cap vii. Non vobis dico, quia ſine Peccato hic vivetis: ſed ſunt Venialia, ſine quibus Vita iſta non eſt.

Caſe, he is guilty of Sin. For he that by Idleneſs, or Negligence, or any unlawful Employment puts himſelf in the Way of Temptation, tempts the Tempter, as it were, to tempt him. *Tertullian* * tells us of a certain Chriſtian in his Time, who went to the *Roman* Theatre, or Stage-Plays, and returned poſſeſt with a Devil: And the unclean Spirit being asked by the Exorciſt, How he durſt preſume to attack a Chriſtian? Anſwered confidently, that he had a Right to do it, becauſe he found the Party upon his own Ground. So that if Men are engaged in any unlawful Buſineſs, and a Temptation then befalls them; the very Temptation itſelf is their Crime, becauſe they make themſelves beforehand Parties, and Acceſſories to it. Or if it befall them without their Sin, yet if afterwards they give way, and conſent, and yield to the Force of it; they make it their Crime by their ſinful Compliance with it. But ſetting aſide theſe Two Caſes, it is no Crime to be tempted, whilſt we are merely Paſſive in the Temptation. Of which we have this infallible Proof and Demonſtration, That CHRIST Himſelf was tempted of the Devil, yet without Sin in any but the Tempter. And ſo long as we keep ourſelves pure after the ſame Example; that we neither be Acceſſory in Calling the Temptation on ourſelves, nor by any ſlaviſh Cowardize in the Spirit of Bondage, yield a baſe Compliance to it; but as ſoon as we find it, reject it with Indignation and Abhorrence, as our Saviour did, *Get thee behind me, Satan, for it is written, Thou ſhalt worſhip the LORD thy God, and Him only ſhalt thou ſerve.* So long, I ſay, as it makes no

* Tertull. de ſpectaculis. cap. 26.

no farther Impreſſion on us, but to raiſe our Anger, or Zeal, or Reſolution againſt it; while we do not receive it with Pleaſure, nor give any Conſent, or Acceſs, or Encouragement to it; ſo ſo far we are ſecure: It is the Devil's Crime, not ours: It may be our Affliction, but it is not our Sin. It may raiſe in us Horror and Aſtoniſhment, as any ſudden Surprize is apt to do; and it may perhaps create us Anguiſh and Trouble, to think how we are expos'd to the Aſſaults of Satan, who has Power to work upon our Imaginations, and thereby diſturb our Fancies, and raiſe unaccountable Thoughts in us: But ſo long as our Wills, over which he has no Power, yield no Conſent, the moſt fiery of all his Darts, the ſubtileſt of all his Devices cannot hurt us. Whilſt we reſiſt the Devil, he muſt at laſt fly from us, and yield the Victory: And then we may rejoyce in the Conqueſt, though perhaps we could not in the very Engagement. *For no Chaſtening for the preſent ſeemeth to be Joyous, but Grievous: Neverthelefs afterward it yieldeth the peaceable Fruit of Righteouſneſs to them that are exerciſed thereby,* Heb. xii. 11. In which Reſpect one Apoſtle bids us, *Count it all Joy when we fall into divers Temptations, knowing this, That the Tryal of our Faith worketh Patience. Only let Patience have her perfect Work,* (Jam. i. 2.) And then it will be Joy in the End, when we have baffled the Adverſary, and gained the Victory. And ſays another Apoſtle, *We glory in Tribulations alſo; knowing that Tribulation worketh Patience, and Patience Experience, and Experience Hope, and Hope maketh not aſhamed, becauſe the Love of God is ſhed abroad in our Hearts by the Holy Ghoſt that is given us,* Rom. v. 3. We do but love GOD the more in ſuch Caſes, the more we are tempted by Satan to deſert or forſake

Him, It quickens our Zeal, redoubles our Care and Watch, invigorates our Faith, and inflames our Devotion, to make us fly with greater Frequency, and greater Ardency to the Throne of Grace, to find Help in Time of Need. So the very Temptations of Satan turn to our Advantage, whilſt we reſiſt and repel them; and we are more than Conquerors over him, becauſe we Invert his wicked Deſigns, and turn thoſe Things to our Health and Strength, which he deſign'd ſhould be an Occaſion of Falling. Therefore we have Reaſon to ſuppoſe in ſuch Caſes, that GOD permits Satan to tempt us only for our Advantage: And it is not only a Demonſtration of his own Wiſdom and Power, ſo to Countermine the Wiles of Satan, and draw Good out of Evil; but alſo an Argument of his Mercy to us, to make our Graces more Illuſtrious, and our Victory more Glorious; whilſt He perfects his Strength in our Weakneſs, and makes us Triumph over all the Power of the Enemy and the very Gates of Hell, which cannot prevail againſt us.

I SUPPOSE, now it appears plainly to every one, that theſe Things are no Impeachments of GOD's Mercy: Though he Firſt ſuffers Temporal Calamities, and Death among theſe, as the Natural effects of Sin, to befall the Penitent Sinners after Pardon; though he ſometimes Secondly ſends Providential Afflictions on them; though Thirdly He viſits them ſometimes with Fears and Tremblings upon the Remembrance of their By-paſt Sins; though Fourthly He leaves them ſtill under the Remains and Struglings of Humane Infirmity, and leſſer Failings and Corruptions; though Fifthly He permits them to be liable to Temptations, and

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to be troubled with black and ugly Thoughts, darted into their Minds againſt their Wills, by the power and ſubtilty of Satan; yet for all this He is a Merciful Father to them: And, *As a Father pitieth his Children, ſo the* LORD *pitieth them that fear Him.*

I CANNOT cloſe this Diſcourſe without making theſe few Moral Reflections on it, by Way of Inference from what has been ſaid.

1. THAT the Senſe of GOD's Mercy in Pardoning the greateſt of Sinners, ſhould encourage all others to return to Him, in the Sincerity of their Hearts, with Hopes of Mercy. There can be no Sin greater than that of murdering CHRIST, and yet GOD was pleas'd to pardon it, for the Encouragement of others, who ſhould repent in future Ages. There can be no Service leſs than that of the Widow's two Mites, and yet GOD was pleas'd to accept it, becauſe it proceeded from a willing Mind, and was anſwerable to the Ability which God had given her, who never requires of any Man more than He firſt enables him to perform.

2. THE Conſideration of GOD's leaving ſometimes Temporal Afflictions upon Men after He pardons their Sin, ſhould teach us to entertain right and honourable Thoughts of GOD's Mercy; not to repine at his Hand or Dealings with us in any other Reſpect, if He grants us the Remiſſion of our Sins; but to be patient and content under any other Afflictions, when we are aſſur'd they are not Arguments of his Wrath, but rather Indications of his Goodneſs and Mercy, who knows what is moſt convenient for us; as *Moſes* told the *Iſraelites*, *Thou*

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ſhalt remember, that as a Father chaſteneth his Son, ſo the LORD *thy God chaſteneth thee.*

3. THE Senſe of GOD's Mercy in Pardoning our Sins, ſhould raiſe in us the higheſt Affections of Love and Gratitude to Him again. For what a Raviſhment is it for a deſponding, poor afflicted Soul to be deliver'd from the Fears of Hell, and to hear CHRIST ſay, as it were, *To Day thou ſhalt be with me in Paradiſe!* What Thanks can any Man render to GOD for ſuch a Bleſſing, leſs than the Obedience of his whole Life? What Zeal can be too great in ſerving ſuch a MASTER! If we offer our Bodies and Souls a living Sacrifice to GOD, and ſerve and glorify Him in both continually, it is but a Reaſonable Service to Him, who hath Redeem'd both from Hell. Let all thoſe therefore, who have the Senſe of GOD's Favour in the Pardon of their Sins, be as ſenſible of their own Obligations to glorify Him both in Body and Soul continually, that they may ſhew forth the Praiſes of Him, who hath call'd them out of Darkneſs into his marvellous Light.

4. *Laſtly*, THE Conſideration of GOD's Mercy and Pity to us, ſhould teach us, in every Inſtance of it, to imitate his bleſs'd Example; To put on Bowels of Mercy, to be kind one to another, Tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as GOD for CHRIST's Sake hath forgiven us: To pity thoſe who know not their own Miſery, nor have any Power or Will to help themſelves: To have Compaſſion on the Ignorant, and them that are out of the Way: To bear with their Infirmities, and even their Prejudices, and Dulneſs, and Obſtinacy, as GOD many Times does with ours; meekly

meekly inſtructing thoſe that oppoſe themſelves, if GOD peradventure may give them Repentance to the Acknowledgment of the Truth. Here every Man is allow'd to have his Share in the Chriſtian Prieſthood, to Call, and Convert, and Save as many as he can, by his private Inſtructions, and publick Example; that he may in this Way alſo ſhew forth the Praiſes of Him that hath call'd him out of Darkneſs into his marvellous Light. None are better qualify'd for this Office, than they who have ſignally experimented GOD's Mercy themſelves. They muſt needs be the beſt Monitors to others, who have felt the Miſery and Slavery of Sin in their own Hearts, and know the Happineſs of Pardon and Deliverance in their own Perſons. It was therefore our Saviour's Admonition to St. *Peter*, upon the View of his Falling and Riſing again, *When thou art converted, ſtrengthen thy Brethren.* And there are infinite Reaſons to engage Penitent Converts to this. Firſt, Compaſſion to Humane Nature, to relieve Men from that Thraldom, which they themſelves were once engag'd in. Then again, Gratitude to GOD, to promote his Glory; which is chiefly done by the Converſion of Sinners, whilſt our Light ſo ſhines before Men, that they may ſee our good Works, and glorify our FATHER which is in Heaven. Which is a Zeal that ought to be in every true Convert, and commonly is in thoſe who have been themſelves great and eminent Sinners. For they to whom GOD forgives much, commonly love Him the more, and labour more abundantly in His Service, as St. *Paul* did, in Conſideration that he had obtained Mercy of GOD, who had been once the greateſt of Sinners. Add to this, the Honour of the Office and Employment, than which nothing can be more Glorious: For it makes

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us Workers together with GOD, and a ſort of Under Saviours to Mankind. *For*, ſays St. *James*, *Brethren, if any of you do err from the Truth, and One convert him; let him know, that he which converteth a Sinner from the error of his Way, ſhall ſave a Soul from Death, and ſhall hide a multitude of Sins.* Finally, It is moſt Beneficial and Advantageous to ourſelves, as it gives us a Title to a greater Degree of Glory in another World. For they that be Teachers, ſhall ſhine as the Brightneſs of the Firmament, and they that turn many to Righteouſneſs, as the Stars for ever and ever. It is impoſſible to give greater Encouragement: GOD grant us his Grace to obtain it, through JESUS CHRIST our Lord.

To Whom, with the FATHER, *and the* HOLY SPIRIT, *be aſcrib'd, as is moſt due, all Honour, Might, Majeſty and Dominion, both Now, and for Evermore.* Amen.

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